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# “Mezzogiorno di fuoco e sangue”: Narratives of Organized Crime and Stereotypes of the South in Songs from Northern and Central Italy

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## Abstract

POPULAR Italian culture has grown ever more interested in the interpenetration between organized crime, state activities and transnational economic processes. However, while these narratives productively analyse—and denounce—the macroeconomic processes underscoring illegal and harmful practices, they also often complement such economic analyses by perpetuating stereotypical characterizations of the people involved in the crimes. In this article, I analyse popular music across five decades, in order to assess the ways in which the denunciation of state crime is persistently connected with clichéd representations of the modes of existence that allegedly characterize Southern Italian populations. Focussing on acclaimed political songs by Northern and Central Italian acts, namely I Giganti, Fabrizio De André, Litfiba, Frankie Hi-NRG and Fabrizio Moro, the article identifies the textual, musical and extra-musical elements that resort to stereotyping Southern Italians in order to make a point about state-driven illegality. I argue that this type of ethnically biased narrative may paradoxically result in a symbolic absolution of the State, in a way that all responsibility for illicit and harmful practices is attributed to Southern communities.

## Introduction

PUBLISHED in the prominent social sciences journal *Meridiana*, Gabriella Gribaudi's renowned essay “Mafia, culture e gruppi sociali” [“Mafia, Cultures and Social Groups”], recently marked 30 years since its publication. Gribaudi opens her essay with a critique of the traditional representations of the mafias<sup>1</sup> as a phenomenon that is indissolubly connected to the “caratteristiche culturali di un certo tessuto sociale, con la sua riottosità ad assumere comportamenti ‘moderni’” (“Mafia” 347) [“cultural characteristics of a certain social fabric, with its recalcitrance towards engaging in ‘modern’ behaviours”]. According to Gribaudi, these representations often indulge in racist manifestations, such that the mafia, camorra

<sup>1</sup> The plural here refers to Italian criminal organizations in general.

and the 'ndrangheta are reduced to functions of a “‘mentalità meridionale” [“Southern ‘mentality’”] and a culture of *omertà*, that is, a conspiracy of silence.<sup>2</sup> In this way, any attempt to defeat these criminal organizations is generally presented as pointless (Gribaudi, “Mafia” 348).

Gribaudi offers us some strategies with which we may challenge this representational model. Firstly, she does so by unearthing the tensions between Southern Italian populations and organized crime, the latter seen as groups that share “norme rigide e settarie, discontinue rispetto ai codici che governano la società circostante” (“Mafia” 348) [“rigid and sectarian rules, which are discontinuous with the codes that govern the surrounding society”]. She proceeds by illustrating the complex web of national politico-economic interests that historically kept the mafias alive and active (349). Subsequently, Gribaudi considers the dialectic between a “culturalista” [“culturalistic”] or “antimeridionale” [“anti-Southern”] interpretation of the phenomenon, and a “materialistica” [“materialistic”] one (350) and situates herself outside of this rigid dichotomy. She argues that refuting culturalistic and essentialistic approaches should not imply the idea “che solo le variabili economiche determinino i comportamenti sociali” (351) [“that only economic variables determine social behaviours”]. Myths and representations have an important “capacità performativa che va analizzata” (351) [“performative capacity that should be analysed”]; societies, signs and meanings are complex and process symbolic traces in a multiplicity of different ways; market forces are multisegmented and are influenced by signs as well as influencing them (351–57).

In this article, I look at how representations of the mafias in Italian popular culture, specifically in songs, overlook and substantially undo the rich complexity of analyses such as Gribaudi’s, by persisting with what she calls the culturalistic approaches to the phenomenon. Importantly, these culturalistic approaches emerge in a historical moment where popular culture has grown more and more interested in the interpenetration of organized crime, state activities and transnational economic processes. Often, then, cultural products might efficiently focus on the analysis and denunciation of the politico-economic processes that articulate illegal and harmful practices, only to then complement the economic analyses with stereotypical characterizations of the people involved in the crimes. Quite frequently, these tend to be the moments when the loaded signifier “South”—in one or more of its multiple Sicilian, Neapolitan, Calabrian, Apulian manifestations—emerges, in order to provide the audience with familiar tropes of innate deviancy and criminal atavism (along the lines of Cesare Lombroso), endemic backwardness and amoral familism (Banfield), incompatibility with democratic participation (Putnam).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> In a deliberate derogatory approach to these criminal entities, I purposely use lowercase (except in quotations) when referring to them.

<sup>3</sup> Cesare Lombroso was a criminologist who, among other things, formulated theories of criminal atavism based on the ethno-racial ancestry of Southern Italians (D’Agostino; Messina, “Contra”). Edward Christie Banfield was a political scientist who conducted ethnographic work in Basilicata, Southern Italy, and concluded that the alleged “backwardness” of the local population was the

As I have argued elsewhere, the trajectory of such an influential best-seller as *Gomorra* [*Gomorra*h] by Roberto Saviano, to the film adaptation directed by Matteo Garrone, is marked by a peculiar shift, whereby an initial approach based on economic drives and market forces, adopted to make sense of the camorra, is gradually replaced by an ethnographic incursion, whereby Naples and its surroundings emerge as places of irremediable otherness, and the existence of a fundamental connection between cultural identities and illegal activities is clearly suggested (Messina, "Matteo Garrone's *Gomorra*"). In a more recent essay, I have identified the ways in which satire regarding the material connections between criminal organizations and politics ends up externalizing responsibilities and ascribing guilt to Sicilian and Calabrian communities (Messina, "The Demonization"). Importantly, these cultural products do not replicate Gribaudi's overcoming of a culturalistic vs. materialistic dichotomy: rather, they are examples of an opportunistic use of materialistic premises in order to validate culturalistic conclusions.

In this paper, I analyse popular music across five decades, in order to assess the ways in which the denunciation of state crime is persistently connected with clichéd representations of the modes of existence that purportedly characterize Southern Italian populations. In so doing I draw upon the work of various authors that address, problematize and criticize the traditional othering of the South in the national Italian context and beyond. As claimed by John Dickie, the Italian South is the constant Other of the nation ("The South"); Gabriella Gribaudi shows how traditional images of the South are constructed on the premise of the negation of the positive values that allegedly define the Italian nation ("Images"), and the same phenomenon is explained by Joseph Pugliese through the prism of racialization ("White").

I will focus on acclaimed political songs by Northern and Central Italian acts, namely, I Giganti, Fabrizio De André, Litfiba, Frankie Hi-NGR and Fabrizio Moro, with the aim of identifying the textual, musical and extra-musical elements that resort to stereotyping Southern Italians in order to make a point about state-driven illegality. The choice of these musicians, and their respective songs, over others is partly due to subjective and idiosyncratic criteria: this was primarily music that accompanied my education and growth in Italy as a culturally engaged subject. However, there are also certain common threads that unite these music acts: first, and irrespective of genre or style, they all belong to a certain "canon" of intellectually and politically engaged [*impegnata*] popular music; second, one could also argue that their regional backgrounds (they are all from the North or the Centre of Italy) facilitate their implicit positioning in such a privileged and *haute* cultural territory. While the five case studies here are presented in chronological order, there appears to be a hiatus between the quantitative temporal proximity

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product of what he described as "amoral familism", i.e. "the inability of the villagers to act together for their common good or, indeed, for any end transcending the immediate, material interest of the nuclear family" (Banfield 10). Largely drawing upon Banfield's work, Robert David Putnam has proposed an analysis of Southern Italian society as extensively characterized by the lack of horizontal solidarity, a disaffection towards the State and diffused forms of vertical exploitation.

between some of the songs, and their perceived degree of contemporaneousness. Most notably, De André's "Don Raffaè" was written and released in 1990, whereas both Litfiba's "Dimmi il nome" and Frankie Hi-NRG's "Fight da faida" are from 1993. But the three years that separate the first song from the last two feel like several decades, perhaps because De André and his songs are generally seen as having a timeless quality to them (Pandin; "De André"), while Litfiba and Frankie are closely associated with specific periods, styles, and historico-cultural junctures.

### **I Giganti: *Terra in bocca—Poesia di un delitto***

THE concept album *Terra in bocca* [Soil in the Mouth], with the subtitle *Poesia di un delitto* [Poetry of a Crime] was released by Milanese progressive rock band I Giganti in 1971. The entire album focusses on a murder committed in a small Sicilian village of "solo cento case" ["only a hundred houses"]. Even with only a few dozen inhabitants, the village experiences a large number of violent crimes:

Lunedì – sparatoria nel mercato del pesce / martedì – col tritolo fan saltare  
una casa / mercoledì – in campagna hanno ucciso un pastore / giovedì – han  
gettato l'autobotte dal molo / venerdì – han trovato una cisterna inquinata

[Monday – shooting in the fish market. / Tuesday – they blast a house with  
TNT. / Wednesday – they killed a shepherd in the fields / Thursday – they  
threw the water tank truck down from the pier / Friday – they found out  
that a cistern was polluted]

This hypertrophic violence, produced in the context of family feuds and conflicts over drinking water, apparently leaves the population indifferent, to the point that "di domenica / tutti alla piazza, a festeggiare il santo del giorno / tutti salutano, tutto è normale" ["on Sunday / everybody is in the town square, celebrating the Saint of the day / they all greet each other, everything goes as usual"]. This portrait of astonishing inertia resonates with a shared image of "renunciation and pessimism that so many commentators, inside and outside, regard as integral to a so-called Sicilian essence" (Schneider and Schneider, "Mafia" 508).

I Giganti's perpetuation of this essentialism is confirmed by the song's spoken lyrics that follow. Up to this point, the group members sing and speak in their characteristic Milanese accents; now, however, the accent switches to Sicilian, or rather, to an exaggerated imitation of it: "Don Vincenzo carissimo, salutammo a vossia / bacciamo le mani don Gaetano, ossequi alla signora" ["Dearest Don Vincenzo, our greetings to you / I kiss your hands, don Gaetano, my respects to your wife"]. Not only do I Giganti use the Sicilian language in order to portray a behaviour that is indifferent and complacent towards mafia violence, they also insert greetings, phrases and rituals that are stereotypically associated with the cultural sphere of the mafia, such as the trite expression "bacciamo le mani" ["I kiss your hands"], which has become a common feature of the "mafioso cinematografico" ["cinematic mafioso"] (Ferraris 393).

Further on in the album, another spoken intermission occurs. This time, in the form of a fictional testimony by a US-American man, which appears in a badly imitated English, full of non-idiomatic expressions: “I was in Sicily in 1936 / Sun and sea like in California, wonderful! / No one washes teeth, / Just someone drinks milk: terrible!” Here, on top of the aforementioned clichés of hypertrophic violence, fatalistic inertia and highly ritualized social practice, I Giganti add images of disgust, filth and repugnancy.

### Fabrizio De André: “Don Raffaè”

FABRIZIO De André’s song “Don Raffaè” was released in 1990 as part of the concept album *Le nuvole* [The Clouds]. Written six years after the artist’s album in the Genoese language *Crêuza de mǎ* [Muletrack by the Sea], and nine years after the untitled album in Sardinian generally referred to as *Indiano* [The Indian], *Le nuvole* confirms De André’s creative and political interest in regional languages (Carbonelli), or “dialetti” [“dialects”], as they are commonly and controversially called in Italy (Coluzzi). Neapolitan, Genoese and Sardinian appear on the album alongside standard Italian and, specifically in the song “Ottocento” [“The Eighteen Hundreds”], a nonsense mixture of Italian and German (Di Padova).

It is important to say that Neapolitan appears for the first time in De André’s oeuvre in *Le nuvole*, in the songs “Don Raffaè” and “La nova gelosia” [“The New Jalousie Blinds”]. While the latter is a traditional eighteenth-century song (Rovira 111), “Don Raffaè” was written by De André—who was from Genoa—in collaboration with Mauro Pagani from Chiari, near Brescia, and Massimo Bubola from Terrazzo, near Verona. The three are described as “un trio di musicisti del nord che diede vita ad una delle melodie partenopee moderne più celebri” (Capasso) [“a trio of musicians from the North that created one of the most famous contemporary Neapolitan melodies”]. Importantly, the variety of Neapolitan used in the song is mixed up with standard Italian expressions (Di Padova 24; Rovira 110).

The only original song in Neapolitan in De André’s vast musical production is about the camorra, which reinforces the most stereotypical representations of Southern Italian identities. In terms of the ordinariness of this topic, Guendalina Carbonelli argues that

Don Raffaè addresses a common situation in Italy where those in need of help and support often turn to criminal organizations rather than the inefficient State. The song depicts the sentiment of reverence and admiration that binds a prison guard to a Camorra boss incarcerated at Poggioreale, Naples. (24)

While De André certainly depicts “a common situation in Italy”, the subjects that happen to act within this situation are marked as Neapolitans. It is also worth noting that De André’s previous use of “dialects”—be they Genoese or Sardinian—had been affirmative (Orlandi). Here, however, it seems that the choice of Neapolitan as a language for the song implied an engagement with the camorra



narrative and, vice versa; it is as though choosing to talk about the camorra required the use of the Neapolitan language.

The music, lyrics and performance of “Don Raffaè” oscillate between the deployment of the usual stereotypes of Neapolitans and the cultural appropriation of their musical and linguistic identities. The lyrics consist of a monologue by prison guard Pasquale Cafiero, whereby the Don Raffaè mentioned in the title is Cafiero’s silent interlocutor, a powerful *camorrista* who is now incarcerated.<sup>4</sup> On one hand, Cafiero embodies the typical stereotype of Neapolitans imagined as subjects that are recalcitrant to law and civic involvement, always trying to ascend socially by means of secret subterfuges, idolizing criminals as political leaders—all while casually drinking coffee. As mentioned above, Cafiero admires Don Raffaè and repeatedly praises him using the epithets, “uomo geniale” [“brilliant man”], “uomo sceltissimo e immenso” [“exceptional and great man”], “Eccellenza” [“Your Excellency”], “nu santo” [“a saint”]. He uses these designations to distinguish Don Raffaè from common criminals, described as “briganti, papponi, cornuti e lacchè” [“brigands, pimps, cuckolds and stooges”], from politicians, characterized as “feti” [“stinkers”], and from the State that “getta la spugna” [“throws in the towel”]. Cafiero finally tries to take advantage of his proximity to the powerful *camorrista* by asking him to use his political influence to secure a job for his brother:

A proposito tengo 'nu frate / Che da quindici anni sta disoccupato / Chill'ha fatto cinquanta concorsi / Novanta domande e duecento ricorsi / Voi che date conforto e lavoro / Eminenza, vi bacio, v'imploro / Chillo duorme co' mamma e con me / Che crema d'Arabia ch'è chisto caffè!

[By the way I've got a brother / Who's been unemployed for fifteen years / He's done fifty job interviews / Ninety applications and two hundred appeals / You offer support and work / Your Eminence, I kiss you, I implore you / He lives with Mom and myself / Oh, this coffee is so delicious!]

It is no surprise that amidst these trite tropes of amoral familism, deviant civic participation, apologia for organized crime, De André’s song inserts a specific distinction between the idolized *camorrista* and the demonized *briganti* [“brigands”], a term that predominantly denotes varied groups of Southern freedom fighters, active specifically (but not exclusively) during the post-unification period. While the distinction is appropriate (cf. Mangiameli; Lupo and Mangiameli), Pasquale Cafiero’s characterization of *briganti* as “fetenza” [“scum”] and of the *camorrista* as a wonderful person is highly contestable in its implicit ambition to represent the prevalent opinions of Neapolitans and Southern Italians (cf. Festa; Gribaudo, “Mafia”).

On the other hand, the song appropriates the ternary rhythm of Southern Italian *tarantella*, and even quotes an older Neapolitan song, Domenico Modugno’s “O ccaffè”. Furthermore, as mentioned above, De André deliberately mixes Neapolitan with Italian, to the point that the potentially celebratory usage of a resisting

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<sup>4</sup> Don Raffaè is usually identified as camorra boss Raffaele Cutolo (Capasso).

minority language—a project that is pursued with Sardinian in *Indiano* and with Genoese in *Crêuza de mă*—gives way to the caricature of a sort of broken Italian, full of “termini storpiati” [“mispronounced words”] (Di Padova 24). All these elements denote a precise strategy of mischaracterization that exposes a mechanism of cultural appropriation and discriminatory mockery. Arguably, De André’s outrageous parody of Neapolitans effaces the elements of politico-economic critique of the song, leaving the listener with a cruel and gratuitous mischaracterization of Neapolitans as irremediably colluding with the camorra.

### **Litfiba: “Dimmi il nome”, and Frankie Hi-NRG: “Fight da faida”**

BOTH contained in albums that were released in 1993, in the aftermath of the brutal violence that characterized the 1992 mafia bombings in Sicily,<sup>5</sup> Litfiba’s rock song “Dimmi il nome” [“Tell me the name”] and Frankie Hi-NRG’s hip-hop track “Fight da faida” [“Fight the Feud”] also have in common the use of the *marranzanu* [traditional Sicilian jaw harp], especially (but not exclusively) in their respective intros. Philip Tagg’s pioneering work on the semiotic analysis of popular music pinpoints minimal units of musical meaning called “musemes” (Tagg), which can carry poietic, structural, paramusical and/or evocative significance. Now, the use of the *marranzanu* in popular Italian culture and beyond is usually meant to hold a specific function, namely, that of evoking the signifiers “Sicily” and “Mafia” (see also Santoro and Sassatelli).

Written as part of the studio album *Terremoto* [Earthquake], the track “Dimmi il nome” starts with an intro on the *marranzanu*, later layered with peddlers’ cries to form a sort of impressionistic soundscape that is meant to evoke a street market. The marked vernacular inflections of the cries are purposely intended to sound like something in between Neapolitan, Apulian and Sicilian. Here the verbal articulation of Litfiba’s frontman Piero Pelù oscillates between intelligible expressions, like “comprate, comprate, ué!” [“buy, buy, hey!”], and indiscernible babble that is replete of -u endings and preconsonantal -sh- (in IPA /ʃ/) sounds, intended to evoke a generic Southern accent. This initial tableau culminates in a final cry: “O terremoto!” [“The earthquake”] where again, use of the definite article *o* instead of the standard Italian *il* is a clear mark of Southernness.

Frankie Hi-NRG’s “Fight da faida” was originally released as a single at the beginning of 1992, and then included in the 1993 studio album *Verba manent* [Words Remain]. As in Litfiba’s “Dimmi il nome”, in “Fight da faida” the *marranzanu* appears at the beginning of the song, counterpointing a repeated figure on the electric bass. In both cases, the audience is being warned through this *marranzanu* museme: *we are about to enter these infamous regions and look at their dodgy mafia businesses, be prepared...*

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<sup>5</sup> Namely, the Capaci massacre of 23 May 1992, where judge Giovanni Falcone was killed with his wife and three police escort agents, and the Via D’Amelio bombing of 19 July 1992, where judge Paolo Borsellino was killed with five police agents.



Frankie Hi-NRG's song literally names some of these places, so that Naples and Palermo are described as "succursali dell'inferno" ["branches of hell"], whereas Cosenza and Potenza are already "carne morta in partenza" ["dead meat from the start"]. The hell metaphor deployed by Frankie sounds like an old-school cliché borrowed directly from nineteenth-century travellers' diaries: the legacy of an entrenched colonial mentality that inscribes the "discovery" and exploration of various *terrae nullius*, from Amazonia (Mendes and Queirós) to Southern Italy (Benigno and Lupo).

Frankie's hell metaphor resonates with the fire and blood metaphor deployed in Litfiba's "Dimmi il nome": "Mezzogiorno di fuoco e sangue" ["South/noon of fire and blood"] is a double reference connected to the polysemicity of the word *mezzogiorno*, meaning both "noon" and "south" (and hence "Southern Italy" by antonomasia). While *Mezzogiorno di fuoco* [literally, "noon of fire"] is the Italian title of the classic 1952 Western film *High Noon*, the lyric refers to Southern Italy. Here again, as the American West is implicitly compared to the Italian South, we have another *terra nullius*: Litfiba exploits the imagery of brutal and gratuitous violence that inscribes narratives of the (US-American) Far West in order to evoke the (Italian) South. In his critical analysis of Spaghetti Westerns, Pugliese suggests the existence of metafigural and allegorical relationships between the Far West narrated in Italian films and Southern Italy ("The Souths"); however, while Pugliese's focus is mainly on Sergio Leone's acknowledgment of the racialized violence perpetrated against Southern populations by the Italian army during the Unification period, Litfiba's comparison seems to conceive violence as a substantially endogenous characteristic.

In "Dimmi il nome", politico-economic, or better, materialistic readings of the phenomenon are almost totally refuted, in order to give way to the identification of a sort of Southern cultural anomaly or guilt. The sense of this anomaly builds up through clichéd images of "famiglie onorabili" ["honourable families"]; people "listening to you through window blinds" ["le persiane ti ascoltano"] and conspiracies of silence summed up by the words "Non so niente, non so dove, Non so dire chi è" ["I don't know anything, I don't know where, I can't tell who it is"], culminating in the hyperbolic: "Non è la fame ma è l'ignoranza che uccide" ["It's not hunger that kills, it's ignorance"]. In other words, according to Litfiba organized crime is a cultural problem, associated with a supposed "ignorance" of the population, and has little or nothing to do with poverty and deprivation. The song ends with the words "fanculo l'onore e l'omertà" ["fuck honour and *omertà*"]. In identifying culture-specific social practices and signifiers as the alleged source of criminal organizations, Litfiba confirm an entrenched culturalistic view on the issue, and, as Pugliese would put it, "trundl[e] out the racist clichés of the northern ethnographer" by "reproduc[ing] ahistorical stereotypes of southern culture that fail to address the layered racial and colonial histories that continue to inscribe the South" (Pugliese, "The Souths" 29).

To some extent, Frankie Hi-NRG's interpretation of the mafias appears to be less culturalistic than Litfiba's, as in "Fight da faida" there are some attempts to consider

the politico-economic and historical nodes that inscribe the phenomenon. At one point, the South becomes the imaginary second-person interlocutor of the singer, who explicitly encourages it to defeat the mafias: “Sud, non ti fare castrare / dal potere criminale / che ti vuole fermare” [“South, don’t let yourself be castrated / by the criminal power / that wants to hinder you”]. Steering clear from the gendered metaphor of castration, whereby a problematic nexus between masculinity and self-determination is clearly established, in “Fight da faida” the general climate of encouragement and empowerment is reinforced by the sampling of the eponymous catchphrase from the song “You Can Make It If You Try” by Sly and the Family Stone. Frankie’s decontextualization of the sample from its original context is not a problem in itself, except that the phrase “if you try” implies the historically and politically indefensible idea that Southern Italian society has never “tried”—individually or collectively—to defeat the mafias.

The final, rapped stanza of “Fight da faida” consists entirely of a declamation of the Sicilian nursery rhyme “Setti fimmini e un tari” [“Seven Women and a Penny”]. Once again, the dislocation of this cultural object is critically ambivalent, as it might oscillate between well-meaning participation and mockery. After all, Frankie’s trajectory as a Turin-born, second-generation Sicilian immigrant surely plays a crucial role in the context of this ambivalence, especially in terms of what Pugliese calls an “assimilationist itinerary [...] shaped by the torsions of violent contradictions” (“Assimilation” 243).

Traces of this critical ambivalence in terms of the South and the mafias also appear in the work of Tuscan subjects with a non-immigrant background such as Litfiba’s authors and frontmen Piero Pelù and Ghigo Renzulli. On the same album *Terremoto*, the track immediately following “Dimmi il nome” is “Maudit” [French for “cursed”]. In “Maudit”, Litfiba address *en passant* the political motives of mafia violence, and state that they would like to tell people “tutto sulla mafia” [“everything about the mafia”] by revealing, among other things, that “le stragi senza nome / tutte passano da Roma” [“the anonymous massacres / all come from Rome”]. In other words, in “Maudit” Litfiba argue that mafia violence is commissioned by the centralized power of the Italian state rather than being a consequence of Southern civilization.

In both cases, however, the acknowledgement of important politico-economic drives does not alleviate a strongly culturalistic interpretation of the phenomenon of organized crime. In “Dimmi il nome” as much as in “Fight da faida”, a sort of essence that permeates subject, cultures, communities and territories is clearly identified as the profound and primary source of the mafias. In this sense, perhaps the Sicilian nursery rhyme inserted at the end of “Fight da faida” could be interpreted as having the same semiotic and “musemic” value as the loaded market soundscape that introduces “Dimmi il nome”: namely, that of a prejudiced and racially charged derision of the cultural practices of Southern communities.

### Fabrizio Moro: “Pensa”

FABRIZIO Moro’s song “Pensa” [“Think!”] was released in 2007 as part of the eponymous album, after winning the *Giovani* [Newcomers] section of the 57th Sanremo Music Festival. From its very title—a second person imperative inviting the interlocutor to think, that is anaphorically repeated during the refrain—the song takes a somewhat paternalistic attitude. A Roman subject, son of Calabrian immigrants, Moro intends to reveal the option of thinking to his implicitly clueless interlocutors. Drawing upon the decolonial writings of thinkers like Walter Mignolo, I argue that, by repeatedly uttering this order, by telling people to think, Moro arrogates at least two fundamental *loci* of epistemic power within the colonizer/colonized dialectic: namely, that of enunciation and that of thought. By situating his interlocutor in “un’isola di sangue” [“an island of blood”], a charged metaphor for Sicily, Moro defines his own *locus* of enunciation as capable of speaking and thinking, as opposed to a Sicily that is implicitly characterized as a “place of non-thought” (Mignolo 3), a subaltern geopolitical subject that, paraphrasing Gayatri Spivak, “cannot speak” (Spivak 308):

Pensa, prima di sparare / Pensa, prima di dire e di giudicare prova a pensare  
/ Pensa, che puoi decidere tu / Resta un attimo soltanto un attimo di più /  
Con la testa fra le mani

[Think, before shooting / think, before speaking and judging, try to think /  
think, that you can decide [for yourself] / stay there just for a moment, one  
more moment / with your head in your hands]

Moro legitimates his “epistemic violence” (Spivak 280) by deploying the aforementioned blood metaphor that casts Sicily, reiteratively, as “un’isola di sangue che fra tante meraviglie / fra limoni e fra conchiglie... massacra figli e figlie” [“an island of blood that in the middle of so much awe / amidst lemons and amidst shells... massacres [her] sons and daughters”]: here the blood/hell metaphor is complemented by heavenly images, a place both awesome and frightful, peaceful and violent, again, in line with the most clichéd representation of colonized places (Benigno and Lupo; Mendes and Queirós).

Moro’s colonial metaphors and his paternalistic invitations to think are complemented by a series of bold statements. One of them in particular instructs us that “in fondo questa vita non ha significato / Se hai paura di una bomba o di un fucile puntato” [“after all, this life has no meaning / if you are afraid of a bomb or of a shotgun being aimed”]. Is Moro aware of what he is proposing here? Does fear for one’s life really invalidate life itself? Is everyone in Sicily supposed to be either a stoic hero or an irresponsible fool? Would Moro himself not be afraid of a bomb or a rifle? Is he implying that the very fact of being afraid for their lives makes Sicilians responsible for the mafia?

As with Frankie Hi-NRG, it is important to acknowledge here the passionate empowering and encouraging tone of Moro’s song. Furthermore, it is important to situate his work, like Frankie’s, within the contradictory assimilationist politics

of diasporic subjects (although Moro speaks about Sicily as a son of Calabrian immigrants). While these caveats are essential, they do not invalidate the critical points mentioned here.

### Final Remarks

IN their discussion of Leonardo Sciascia's antimafia trajectory, Peter and Jane Schneider reflect on the difficulty, for any discourse that opposes organized crime, to seek "liberation from the mafia without embracing the almost racialized categorization of Sicilians that permeates the national discourse on the South" (Schneider and Schneider, "Il Caso" 245).<sup>6</sup> All based on ethnically biased narratives, the songs analysed in this work are largely continuing to embrace this racialized categorization of Sicilians and Southern Italians, despite their general interest in and intention to discuss critically the politico-economic processes that sustain the mafias.

Apropos of racialized categorizations, a discussion of the role of race and whiteness in the context of the production of these musical and textual traces has not been at the forefront of my analysis in this particular essay. However, it is important to clarify that pervasive and perpetual demarcations of a "racist North/South divide" (Pugliese, "White" par. 9) facilitate the identification of some perceived anomalies in the bodies, behaviours and existences of Southerners. In other words, the variegated imagery that I have identified in the songs analysed here exists as a function of the desire of these Northern and Central musicians to secure a privileged position of whiteness, by demarcating it against the raced abnormality of Southerners (cf. Pugliese, "White").

Having said that, I need to acknowledge that the production of racist representations of Southerners is by no means an exclusive prerogative of Northern and Central Italians. On the contrary, South-shaming is an established global trend as well as a not-so-uncommon practice in the South itself. After all, Dickie reminds us that "dominant forms of ethnocentrism towards the South" must be read as "the product of attempts to imagine and construct a uniform national space" rather than simply as "a matter of regionalism" (126). Nevertheless, the Central and Northern regional backgrounds of the five acts mentioned in this paper are relevant, as they indicate fundamental issues of cultural appropriation as well as highlighting the violent contradictions inherent to trajectories of assimilation for second-generation Southern immigrants.

Certainly, the musical, performatic and artistic quality of these five works is not in doubt, regardless of their chronological spread and substantial differences in terms of genre and style. Similarly, the courageous antimafia passion that

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<sup>6</sup> The authors' remark partly refers to Leonardo Sciascia's late quarrels with antimafia activists and judges, which came unexpectedly after a lifetime of intellectual activity against the mafia. Schneider and Schneider show that Sciascia's late position was based on an essentialist vision of Sicilianness, based on the idea that mafia is intrinsic to Sicilian identity, and that thus any effort to defeat it would be pointless and harmful ("Il Caso"; "Mafia").

permeates all these musical works needs to be acknowledged. In the case of *Terra in bocca*, I Giganti were even boycotted by the national radio stations (Plastino 199; Rinaldi): as Marianna Bruschi puts it, “parlare di mafia, allora non fu possibile” [“at that time, talking about mafia was not possible”].

Respected as it should be, this antimafia passion—when associated with caricatural characterizations of Southernness—runs the risk of constituting an easy access door to the deployment of stereotypes and racialized representations that would be unacceptable in other contexts (Dickie 135). When as sensitive a matter as Southern identity encounters the problematics of the struggle against the mafias, some judgments are inevitably suspended: we lose track of the “*indigenous* cultural milieu” that characterizes “the antimafia effort to change society” (Schneider and Schneider, “Mafia” 508), and we might even find ourselves uncritically cheering Northern musicians who mock Southern customs, practices, languages and accents, by associating them all with the mafias.

Once Southern identities are held to be the real source of the mafias, the importance of the politico-economic analyses, that constitute such a significant element of these works, might be strongly reconsidered. This, I contend, paradoxically results in a symbolic absolution of national institutions and society, in a way that all responsibility for illicit and harmful practices is simply handed over to Southern communities. Ultimately, in this context, the South pays the price for the existence of the mafias twice: firstly, by being subjected to the disproportionate levels of violence and abuse that criminal organizations exert on Southern territories and populations; secondly, by being, as a victim, consistently blamed and shamed by the national cultural debate.

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